

CNN: Key Steps That Administrator Scott Pruitt Has Taken At EPA

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The Huffington Post: EPA Defends Scott Pruitt's Multiple Email Addresses As 'Standard Practice Since Clinton'

The Environmental Protection Agency defended embattled Administrator Scott Pruitt against Republican criticism Tuesday over his use of multiple email addresses, insisting it was "standard practice since the Clinton administration." In an email sent Thursday under that subject line, Jahan Wilcox, a top agency spokesman, said Pruitt only used one of his four email accounts for correspondence, while the others were used to receive emails from the general public and allow staff to manage his calendar. The fourth address, he said, was deleted. Wilcox listed the four email addresses Gina McCarthy, Pruitt's predecessor, used, and linked to a 2012 Politico story detailing a controversy over former Administrator Lisa Jackson's secondary email address. In that article, officials from former President George W. Bush's administration said the "arrangement is nothing new."

Bloomberg BNA: EPA to Clarify When Cities Can Blend Wastewater

City water systems inundated with stormwater and sewage during heavy rains will soon get direction from the EPA on when they can bypass pollution treatment requirements. The Environmental Protection Agency plans to pursue a rulemaking that it hopes will end the confusion surrounding the practice of managing heavy volumes of wastewater. "There has been lack of clarity about this issue for decades," David Ross, EPA assistant administrator for water, announced April 18 to wastewater and water reuse officials at the opening session of the National Water Policy Fly-In. Blending refers to the practice of routing a portion of incoming stormwater and sewage around a critical treatment process during heavy storms and then recombining it with treated flows before discharging it to receiving waters known as mixing zones. Utilities say they have to do this to prevent their treatment plants from being inundated during wet weather events that generate high volumes of wastewater.

Houston Business Journal: EPA Removes Houston-Area Waste Pits From List Of Superfund Sites 'Targeted For Immediate, Intense Action'

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has removed the San Jacinto River Waste Pits near Houston and a copper mine in Nevada from EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's so-called "Emphasis List" of Superfund sites. The list identifies sites that will benefit from Pruitt's "targeted immediate and intense attention," according to the EPA's April 16 press release. Initially released last December in response to the Superfund Task Force Recommendations, the list is expected to be revised quarterly, per the release. The removal comes a week after other news regarding the San Jacinto River Waste Pits. On April 9, the EPA announced an agreement has been reached with Memphis, Tennessee-based International Paper Co. (NYSE: IP) and McGinnes Industrial Maintenance Corp., which are the companies responsible for the site, per the Texas Tribune. MIMC is a subsidiary of Houston-based Waste Management Inc. (NYSE: WM).

The Hill: Trump's EPA Quietly Revamps Rules For Air Pollution

The Trump administration has quietly reshaped enforcement of air pollution standards in recent months through a series of regulatory memos. The memos are fulfilling the top wishes of industry, which has long called for changes to how the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) oversees the nation's factories, plants and other facilities. The EPA is now allowing certain facilities to be subject to less-stringent regulations and is letting companies use friendlier math in calculating their expected emissions. Environmentalists and public health advocates say the memos could greatly increase levels of air pollutants like mercury, benzene and nitrogen oxides. They accuse the EPA of avoiding the transparency and public input requirements that regulatory changes usually go through.

National News Highlights 4.18.18

The New York Times: Mike Pompeo, C.I.A. Director, Met With Kim Jong-Un In North Korea

President Trump dispatched the C.I.A. director Mike Pompeo to North Korea to meet with its leader, Kim Jong-un, in recent weeks to lay the groundwork for a summit meeting between Mr. Kim and Mr. Trump, two people briefed on the secret trip said on Tuesday. Mr. Trump alluded to Mr. Pompeo's mission when he said on Tuesday afternoon that the United States was in direct talks with North Korea at "extremely high levels," and that the White House was looking at five sites for a potential meeting of the two leaders. The White House has used intelligence, rather than diplomatic channels, to communicate with North Korea, ever since last month, when Mr. Trump unexpectedly accepted Mr. Kim's invitation to meet. Mr. Pompeo, who is awaiting confirmation as secretary of state, has been dealing with North Korean representatives through a channel that runs between the C.I.A. and its North Korean counterpart, the Reconnaissance General Bureau, according to other officials. And he has been in close touch with the director of South Korea's National Intelligence Service, Suh Hoon, who American officials said brokered Mr. Kim's invitation to Mr. Trump.

The Wall Street Journal: Barbara Bush Dies At Age 92

Barbara Pierce Bush went from a privileged childhood to become the wife of one president and mother of another, serving throughout as a pugnacious guardian of what had become America's most prominent political family. Mrs. Bush died Tuesday at the family's home in Houston at the age of 92, a family spokesman said, with her husband, former President George H. W. Bush, at her side. Her death came two days after the spokesman said she was in failing health and had decided not to seek additional medical treatment. With her white hair and string of pearls, Mrs. Bush was an instantly recognizable national figure, particularly after the election in 1988 of her husband as the nation's 41st president. Unlike some political spouses, she never claimed to have strong political views or an agenda of her own, though she started a well-regarded program to promote national literacy.

The Associated Press: As GOP Balks, McConnell Shuts Down Bill To Protect Mueller

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell on Tuesday thwarted a bipartisan effort to protect special counsel Robert Mueller's job, saying he will not hold a floor vote on the legislation even if it is approved next week in the Senate Judiciary Committee. McConnell said the bill is unnecessary because President Donald Trump will not fire Mueller. "We'll not be having this on the floor of the Senate," McConnell said on Fox News. His comments came amid widespread opposition to the bill among members of his caucus, with several GOP senators saying the bill is unconstitutional. Others said it's simply not good politics to try and tell Trump what to do, likening the legislation to "poking the bear." The bipartisan legislation was introduced last week as Trump publicly criticized Mueller, who is investigating potential ties between Russia and Trump's 2016 campaign as well as possible obstruction of justice by the president. Trump, fuming about a raid of his personal lawyer's office by a different division of the FBI, said last week that the Mueller investigation is "an attack on our country" and is "corrupt."

TRUMP TWEETS

CNN

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/17/politics/scott-pruitt-epa-track-record/index.html>

Key Steps That Administrator Scott Pruitt Has Taken At EPA

By Juana Summers, 4/18/18

Scott Pruitt's tenure as the head of the Environmental Protection Agency has been marked by stories scrutinizing his first-class travel on the taxpayer dime, his lease agreement in Washington and his use of a full-time security detail.

But Pruitt has also been a reliable ally for President Donald Trump, who made easing regulations on American industries a central campaign promise, and the EPA administrator has proposed a slew of rollbacks for major environmental rules, including those governing clean air and water and fighting climate change.

Put together, Pruitt's moves -- some of which have been challenged in court -- represent an attempt to fundamentally restructure the EPA's role in Washington, and are a sharp rebuke of the environmental legacy of former President Barack Obama.

Here are some of Pruitt's key changes:

Changing how the EPA approaches climate change

Like others in the Trump administration, Pruitt has repeatedly highlighted uncertainty about the role that humans have played in global warming, a view that is at odds with the vast majority of scientific evidence. Last month, the EPA circulated talking points instructing its staffers to say "clear gaps" exist in understanding whether human activity contributes to climate change. The EPA also removed references to climate change from several webpages, according to an analysis by the Environmental Data and Governance Initiative.

Rolling back car emissions standards

Pruitt announced in early April that he would revise Obama-era greenhouse gas emissions standards for automobiles, a move that undercut a signature part of Obama's efforts to fight climate change.

The weakening of automobile standards, which is a win for car manufacturers and a blow to environmentalists, also sets up a fight between the Trump administration and the state of California, which says it plans to stick with the stricter rules.

Proposing an overhaul of Obama-era initiatives on coal ash

In March, the EPA proposed changes to the Obama-era directive regulating coal ash waste, giving states and utilities more power to manage their own disposal of it. The proposal, according to The Washington Post, includes more than a dozen changes for how coal ash, which remains when coal is burned in power plants and electricity is generated, is stored at coal-fired power plants nationwide, and would let states change how frequently they test for groundwater contamination.

The decision was praised by industry officials who had called on Pruitt to revisit the rules, but environmental groups said he was caving to special interests in the coal industry.

Withdrawing regulations on 'major sources' of pollution

The EPA announced in January that it was withdrawing the "once-in always-in" policy under the Clean Air Act that dictated how major sources of hazardous air pollutants are regulated. The decades-old policy was opposed by fossil fuel companies, but environmental groups argued that its withdrawal would result in more pollution.

Suspending clean water rule

The EPA announced in January that it would suspend the Waters of the United States rule, which was designed to limit pollution in roughly 60% of the country's bodies of water. Critics said the rule was overly broad in classifying waterways that are subject to federal rules, while supporters see it as a necessary protection, for example, preventing fertilizer runoff from tainting streams and drinking water.

Withdrawing from Clean Power Plan

Pruitt announced in October his decision to withdraw from the Clean Power Plan, the Obama-era rule intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from power plants across the country. The Clean Power Plan had a goal of decreasing the country's carbon pollution by roughly one-third by 2030, compared with 2005 levels.

.ttempting to suspend an Obama-era methane rule

Under Pruitt, the EPA tried to suspend an Obama-era rule to restrict methane emissions from new oil and gas wells. But a federal court ruled in August that the EPA must enforce the Obama administration's regulation.

Pushing to withdraw the US from the Paris climate accord

Pruitt pushed the White House to leave the Paris climate deal, stood beside the President in the Rose Garden when he announced the decision and after the President spoke offered his own remarks. The move was condemned by global leaders and was seen by many as a setback to efforts to address global warming.

The Huffington Post

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/pruitt-emails-epa_us_5ad6701be4b03c426da92c1b

EPA Defends Scott Pruitt's Multiple Email Addresses As 'Standard Practice Since Clinton'

By Alexander Kaufman, 4/17/18

The Environmental Protection Agency defended embattled Administrator Scott Pruitt against Republican criticism Tuesday over his use of multiple email addresses, insisting it was "standard practice since the Clinton administration."

In an email sent Thursday under that subject line, Jahan Wilcox, a top agency spokesman, said Pruitt only used one of his four email accounts for correspondence, while the others were used to receive emails from the general public and allow staff to manage his calendar. The fourth address, he said, was deleted.

Pruitt's email accounts, revealed five days ago by The Washington Post, raised concerns that the EPA failed to disclose emails linked to the secret accounts in public records requests. The controversy added to the rapidly cascading series of corruption scandals and ethical lapses that have caused dozens of Democrats and at least three Republican members of Congress to call for his resignation.

Wilcox listed the four email addresses Gina McCarthy, Pruitt's predecessor, used, and linked to a 2012 Politico story detailing a controversy over former Administrator Lisa Jackson's secondary email address. In that article, officials from former President George W. Bush's administration said the "arrangement is nothing new."

But that didn't quell concerns from Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), a staunch supporter of the Trump administration's environmental agenda, who asked the Pruitt to "affirm that the EPA does in fact search all your official email accounts when responding to FOIA requests" in a letter sent to the administrator Friday.

"During your confirmation hearing, I specifically asked you to 'refrain from taking any action — that makes it difficult or impossible for the public to access your official written communications under the Freedom of Information Act,'" Barrasso wrote to Pruitt, according to a transcript published by The Hill and The Washington Post. "You agreed to my request."

After the Government Accountability Office released a report Monday saying that the \$43,000 the EPA spent on a soundproof phone booth for Pruitt was illegal, Barrasso escalated pressure on the administrator by demanding that he "give a full public accounting of this expenditure and explain why the agency thinks it was complying with the law."

In a separate memo, Wilcox outlined the agency's defenses on the phone booth and another controversy involving five-figure raises given to EPA political appointees under the Safe Drinking Water Act after the White House rejected

requests to bump their salaries. The latter scandal blew up two weeks ago when Pruitt struggled to defend himself during a surprisingly aggressive Fox News interview.

Bloomberg BNA

<https://news.bloombergenvironment.com/environment-and-energy/epa-to-clarify-when-cities-can-blend-wastewater-1>

EPA to Clarify When Cities Can Blend Wastewater

By Amena Saiyid, 4/17/18

City water systems inundated with stormwater and sewage during heavy rains will soon get direction from the EPA on when they can bypass pollution treatment requirements.

The Environmental Protection Agency plans to pursue a rulemaking that it hopes will end the confusion surrounding the practice of managing heavy volumes of wastewater.

"There has been lack of clarity about this issue for decades," David Ross, EPA assistant administrator for water, announced April 18 to wastewater and water reuse officials at the opening session of the National Water Policy Fly-In.

Blending refers to the practice of routing a portion of incoming stormwater and sewage around a critical treatment process during heavy storms and then recombining it with treated flows before discharging it to receiving waters known as mixing zones. Utilities say they have to do this to prevent their treatment plants from being inundated during wet weather events that generate high volumes of wastewater.

The EPA's ban on the practice of blending was struck down in 2013 by a U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit decision. Since that ruling, the EPA has chosen to apply the Iowa League of Cities v. EPA in the seven states where the court had jurisdiction, a move that caused much confusion among cities and counties.

The states within the Eighth Circuit's jurisdiction are Arkansas, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

"I am not a huge fan of trying to solve through guidance, so we will roll up our sleeves and do rulemaking," Ross said, adding to expect a proposal sometime this year.

Ross didn't say whether the agency would apply the federal appellate ruling nationwide instead of on a case-by-case basis outside the Eighth Circuit. The EPA did acknowledge that it wants to provide regulatory certainty to wastewater facilities so they can "optimize" wastewater treatment during wet weather. That will protect both water quality and public health in the communities they serve.

"We are at the very start of the rulemaking process," Andrew Sawyers, director of EPA's Office of Wastewater Management, told Bloomberg Environment on the sidelines of the session.

Sawyers said he didn't want to get ahead of the agency by stating what direction the rulemaking would take. Rather, he emphasized that it would be crafted after engaging with the municipalities that have been affected by the EPA's past policy.

Cautiously Hopeful

Water and wastewater utilities have been discussing the practice of blending with the EPA and state regulatory agencies for three decades, Rajendra Bhattarai, division manager for Austin Water Utility's environmental and regulatory services, told Bloomberg Environment, adding the rulemaking has been a "long time" in the making.

Bhattarai said he hopes the EPA's upcoming rule provides direction on when and how blending should be used.

"It should not be abused, but only be used when needed to avoid damaging the plant's treatment systems, while protecting public health and environment," Bhattarai said.

Likewise, the National Association of Clean Water Agencies, which represents municipal-owned utilities, wants the EPA to provide clarity around wet weather treatment practices.

"We just don't know enough about it yet or what they want to do," Nathan Gardner-Andrews, the association's chief advocacy officer, told Bloomberg Environment.

Houston Business Journal

<https://www.bizjournals.com/houston/news/2018/04/17/epa-removes-houston-area-waste-pits-from-list-of.html>

EPA Removes Houston-Area Waste Pits From List Of Superfund Sites 'Targeted For Immediate, Intense Action'

By Olivia Pulsinelli, 4/17/18

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has removed the San Jacinto River Waste Pits near Houston and a copper mine in Nevada from EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's so-called "Emphasis List" of Superfund sites.

The list identifies sites that will benefit from Pruitt's "targeted immediate and intense attention," according to the EPA's April 16 press release. Initially released last December in response to the Superfund Task Force Recommendations, the list is expected to be revised quarterly, per the release.

The removal comes a week after other news regarding the San Jacinto River Waste Pits. On April 9, the EPA announced an agreement has been reached with Memphis, Tennessee-based International Paper Co. (NYSE: IP) and McGinnes Industrial Maintenance Corp., which are the companies responsible for the site, per the Texas Tribune. MIMC is a subsidiary of Houston-based Waste Management Inc. (NYSE: WM).

The companies initially opposed the cleanup plan that was approved in October, but they have now agreed to foot the \$115 million bill, per the Tribune. The plan includes installing engineering controls before excavating approximately 212,000 cubic yards of dioxin-contaminated material for disposal, per the April 9 release. The remedial design is expected to take about 29 months, and International Paper Co. and MIMC will perform the design work under the oversight of the EPA and the Texas Commission of Environmental Quality. While the remedial design is underway, the U.S. Department of Justice and the EPA will begin negotiating with the potential responsible parties regarding construction of the remedy, per the April 9 release.

Quarterly inspection and maintenance of the existing temporary cap will continue during the process, per the release. The San Jacinto River Waste Pits site consists of two sets of pits, called impoundments, built in the mid-1960s. They were used to dispose of solid and liquid pulp and paper mill wastes contaminated with dioxins and furans but were covered with an armored cap as a temporary containment method in 2011. The 14-acre northern set of impoundments is on the western bank of the San Jacinto River, north of the Interstate 10 bridge, and is partially submerged. The southern impoundment covers less than 20 acres on a small peninsula south of the I-10 bridge.

The site was added to the National Priorities List of Superfund sites in 2008.

The Hill

<http://thehill.com/policy/healthcare/383661-trumps-epa-quietly-revamps-rules-for-air-pollution>

Trump's EPA Quietly Revamps Rules For Air Pollution

By Tim Cama, 4/18/18

The Trump administration has quietly reshaped enforcement of air pollution standards in recent months through a series of regulatory memos.

The memos are fulfilling the top wishes of industry, which has long called for changes to how the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) oversees the nation's factories, plants and other facilities. The EPA is now allowing certain facilities to be subject to less-stringent regulations and is letting companies use friendlier math in calculating their expected emissions.

Environmentalists and public health advocates say the memos could greatly increase levels of air pollutants like mercury, benzene and nitrogen oxides. They accuse the EPA of avoiding the transparency and public input requirements that regulatory changes usually go through.

"All of these, individually and taken together, will result in more air pollution and less enforcement of the Clean Air Act," said Paul Billings, senior vice president for advocacy at the American Lung Association.

"These were radical departures of current law when they were proposed a decade ago and they're just as radical today," he said, referring to the Bush-era efforts, some of which were unsuccessful, to make changes to EPA air programs.

But for the EPA and its supporters, the memos simply bring the agency back to what the relevant laws and regulations are meant to be.

"They address specific concerns that people have had for years, and just make it much simpler for people to comply — especially for existing [facilities] — to make sure they can maintain their plants and replace worn-out components and those types of things, without the threat of enforcement litigation," said Jeff Holmstead, a former head of the EPA's air pollution office under the George W. Bush administration who now represents regulated companies at the law and lobbying firm Bracewell.

Bill Wehrum, head of the air office under EPA chief Scott Pruitt, wrote two of the three EPA memos. He recused himself from the third memo, which Pruitt wrote.

The first memo, issued in December, states that the EPA will no longer "second guess" companies' calculations of their expected pollution output after certain big projects under what is known as New Source Review. Under that program, the EPA reviews the changes made to a facility to decide whether they need to go through the same process as if the facility were newly built.

The December memo effectively means the EPA will usually not take action against a company for its calculations if they turn out to be wrong.

The second memo, issued in January, repeals a Clinton-era policy known as "once in, always in." Under the previous policy, facilities could never be considered "minor" sources of hazardous pollution if they were already considered "major" sources, and subject to much stricter rules.

Now, facilities can be regulated as "minor" if their emissions drop enough.

The third memo allows companies to use a procedure known as "project netting" when applying for permits for major projects under the New Source Review program. That means companies can use a more industry-friendly emissions calculation when they argue that a particular project would reduce emissions.

President Trump added to the memos last week, signing one himself that formally asks the EPA to use more industry-friendly practices in enforcing the National Ambient Air Quality Standards program, a key Clean Air Act program for air quality nationwide.

John Walke, director for clean air at the Natural Resources Defense Council, said the EPA is working to implement the policies the Bush administration failed to finish.

"I think Mr. Wehrum has decided this is likely a one-term administration and he's going to devote his full resources to rolling back clean air, climate and public health protections in the time available to him," Walke said.

"The most expedient and hasty way to accomplish those rollbacks is through the regular guidance documents that we have seen so far from EPA," he said. "Rulemakings take time, they require public notice and input and hearings, and Mr. Wehrum and Mr. Pruitt plainly have no patience for those tedious faddlers."

Walke said that, taken together, the memos could allow polluting facilities to greatly increase their emissions.

The EPA didn't respond to requests for comment.

The focus among the memos for environmental and health advocates is the one repealing the "once in, always in" policy, and letting "major" pollution sources reduce their emissions and be regulated as "minor" ones.

A coalition of environmental groups sued the EPA to stop the policy change, arguing that it should have gone through the full regulatory process, including analysis of its environmental impact and an opportunity for public comment. Democratic states joined in with their own lawsuit.

"Instead of prioritizing the health of hard-working Americans, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt wants to let major polluters off the hook. That is unconscionable, and it is illegal," said California Attorney General Xavier Becerra (D).

"If the 'Once In, Always In' policy is rescinded, children in California and around the country — particularly those who must live near the polluting plant or factory — may grow up in an environment with tons of additional hazardous pollutants in the air they breathe. California will not allow that to happen," Becerra said.

Two environmental groups opposed to the EPA's move have put out recent analyses of the change, focused on specific areas of the country.

The Environmental Integrity Project looked at 12 industrial plants in the Midwest and concluded they could increase their pollution to 540,000 pounds annually, a fourfold growth.

The Environmental Defense Fund looked at the Houston area, and said that 18 facilities there could increase their emissions to 900,000 pounds a year, two and a half times current levels.

Holmstead said opponents of the Trump administration's policy are unlikely to prevail. The Supreme Court ruled in the 2015 *Perez v. Mortgage Bankers Association* case that federal agencies can repeal policy memos with other policy memos and don't have to go through the full regulatory process to do so.

"I think the environmental groups are going to have a real uphill battle trying to get through court that this is somehow improper," he said. "That really does fly in the face of the *Perez* decision."

As for the increase in emissions, Holmstead said environmentalists are wrong. In many cases, the new policies will allow facilities to carry out projects that reduce emissions, or simply operate under a lower paperwork burden.

"They have yet to come up with any real-world examples of how that might happen," Holmstead said of the scenarios in which pollution might increase. "These reforms are not going to lead to pollution increases."

"I don't think that there will be a meaningful impact one way or another."

Mike Pompeo, C.I.A. Director, Met With Kim Jong-Un In North Korea

by Mark Lander and Matt Rosenberg, 4/17/18

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — President Trump dispatched the C.I.A. director Mike Pompeo to North Korea to meet with its leader, Kim Jong-un, in recent weeks to lay the groundwork for a summit meeting between Mr. Kim and Mr. Trump, two people briefed on the secret trip said on Tuesday.

Mr. Trump alluded to Mr. Pompeo's mission when he said on Tuesday afternoon that the United States was in direct talks with North Korea at "extremely high levels," and that the White House was looking at five sites for a potential meeting of the two leaders.

The White House has used intelligence, rather than diplomatic channels, to communicate with North Korea, ever since last month, when Mr. Trump unexpectedly accepted Mr. Kim's invitation to meet.

Mr. Pompeo, who is awaiting confirmation as secretary of state, has been dealing with North Korean representatives through a channel that runs between the C.I.A. and its North Korean counterpart, the Reconnaissance General Bureau, according to other officials. And he has been in close touch with the director of South Korea's National Intelligence Service, Suh Hoon, who American officials said brokered Mr. Kim's invitation to Mr. Trump.

On Tuesday, Mr. Trump also said he would give his blessing to North and South Korea to "discuss the end of the war" when the leaders of those countries meet this month, opening the door to a peace treaty that would replace the armistice that halted the Korean War in 1953.

His statements, which came as he welcomed Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan to his oceanfront estate here, were fresh evidence of a diplomatic thaw underway on the Korean Peninsula, and made a once-unthinkable encounter between him and Mr. Kim far more likely.

The president did not specify who in his administration was talking to North Korea, nor did he give any hint of the sites under consideration — adding to the aura of mystery that has enveloped this potential meeting. The Washington Post first reported Mr. Pompeo's trip, which took place over Easter.

But his comments could raise other thorny issues. A peace treaty with North Korea would greatly increase pressure to ease economic sanctions on the North and to withdraw American troops from the Korean Peninsula. It would also complicate the already tangled diplomacy in East Asia.

In his meeting with Mr. Abe, however, Mr. Trump projected optimism. He described North Korea in language worlds away from the speech he gave in November in Seoul, when he called it cruel and barbaric, "the results of a tragic experiment in a laboratory of history."

"I really believe there's a lot of good will," Mr. Trump said. "They do respect us. We are respectful of them."

He even suggested that the North and the South might announce some kind of deal before he met Mr. Kim.

On Tuesday, a South Korean newspaper, Munhwa Ilbo, reported that the two countries were negotiating an announcement "to ease military tensions and end a military confrontation," as part of the summit meeting planned between Mr. Kim and President Moon Jae-in of South Korea.

That could involve pulling troops out of the Demilitarized Zone, making it a genuinely "Demilitarized Zone." A South Korean government official later played down the report, saying it was too soon to tell what a joint statement by Mr. Moon and Mr. Kim would contain, other than broad and "abstract" statements about the need for North Korea to "denuclearize."

But analysts said South Korea was aiming for a comprehensive deal, in which the North agreed to give up its weapons in return for a security guarantee, including a peace treaty. Mr. Trump's comments suggested he backed that effort.

"They do have my blessing to discuss the end of the war," he said. "People don't realize that the Korean War has not ended. It's going on right now. And they are discussing an end to war. Subject to a deal, they have my blessing."

While Mr. Abe lavished praise on Mr. Trump for the sanctions campaign, which he said had brought North Korea to the table, he did not repeat the president's words about an end to the Korean War.

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"Donald," he said, "you've demonstrated your unwavering determination in addressing the challenge of North Korea."

Mr. Abe said only that he hoped that the talks with Mr. Kim would force the North to address the threats posed by its nuclear and missile programs, as well as its abduction of Japanese citizens — a politically resonant issue in Japan that Mr. Trump promised to raise with Mr. Kim.

"Abe put on a surprisingly brave face," said Michael J. Green, a senior vice president at the Center for Strategic and International Studies who advised President George W. Bush on North Korea. "The president of the United States just endorsed a peace treaty with North Korea, a declared nuclear weapons state, and they offered nothing in return."

China, which is a signer to the 1953 armistice, has long favored a peace treaty. But Japan, which did not sign it, is suspicious of one — as are some foreign policy experts in the United States, who point out that the North has yet to take any tangible steps to give up its nuclear arsenal.

The idea of a peace treaty is not new. The United States and North Korea discussed it in the 1990s and again in 2005. But it has never gone anywhere, largely because North Korea has reneged on pledges to give up its nuclear program.

Most scholars and officials agree that North and South Korea cannot themselves announce an end to the Korean War. It has to involve the United States and China as well, since both were signers to the armistice.

In welcoming Mr. Abe to his estate, Mar-a-Lago, for two days of meetings, Mr. Trump clearly hoped to change the subject from tampered documents, confiscated legal files and other symbols of the political storm clouds that hover over both leaders back home.

After days of ominous reports about his personal lawyer, Michael D. Cohen, and unflattering descriptions in a new book by James B. Comey, the F.B.I. director he ousted, Mr. Trump appeared to savor the prospect of discussing trade and the nuclear threat from North Korea with Mr. Abe, whom he described in Twitter as a "truly fine gentleman."

The stakes are even higher for Mr. Abe, whose political survival is in doubt after two domestic scandals have sapped his approval ratings and raised questions about whether he will be forced to resign.

Mr. Abe has invested heavily in his relationship with Mr. Trump, whom he first visited at Trump Tower even before he was sworn in. Preserving that relationship, in the face of fresh challenges in trade and from North Korea, could affect Mr. Abe's standing in Japan.

The White House sought to put a good face on the meeting, describing Japan as a great ally of the United States and Mr. Abe as a friend of Mr. Trump. But officials acknowledged there would be differences over trade, with Mr. Trump pushing for a trade deal between the two countries and Mr. Abe stung by Mr. Trump's decision not to exempt Japan, like other American allies, from sweeping tariffs on steel exports.

"We have certain disagreements with respect to some of the trading issues," Larry Kudlow, Mr. Trump's chief economic adviser, told reporters before the meeting. "We'll iron those out, hopefully."

Mr. Kudlow said he expected Mr. Abe to petition Mr. Trump to grant Japan an exemption, but declined to predict how he would respond. He also tamped down expectations about the United States rejoining the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Asian trade pact, now anchored by Japan, which Mr. Trump pulled out of during his first week in office.

"We are in the pre-preliminary stages of any discussions," he said. "It's more of a thought than a policy."

Having met six times — including once before at Mar-a-Lago — and spoken by phone 20 times, Mr. Trump and Mr. Abe were likely to talk about the issues dogging them at home, officials said. But American officials said they did not believe that would dominate their discussions.

"It's all part and parcel of the relationship," said Matthew Pottinger, the senior director for Asia at the National Security Council. "Sometimes they talk about the respective politics in each other's countries. They enjoy talking about it."

The Wall Street Journal

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/barbara-bush-dies-at-age-92-1524008885>

Barbara Bush Dies At Age 92

By Gerald Seib, 4/17/18

Barbara Pierce Bush went from a privileged childhood to become the wife of one president and mother of another, serving throughout as a pugnacious guardian of what had become America's most prominent political family.

Mrs. Bush died Tuesday at the family's home in Houston at the age of 92, a family spokesman said, with her husband, former President George H. W. Bush, at her side. Her death came two days after the spokesman said she was in failing health and had decided not to seek additional medical treatment.

With her white hair and string of pearls, Mrs. Bush was an instantly recognizable national figure, particularly after the election in 1988 of her husband as the nation's 41st president. Unlike some political spouses, she never claimed to have strong political views or an agenda of her own, though she started a well-regarded program to promote national literacy.

Instead, the nation came to know her as the widely admired and humorous matron of a large and expanding extended family, which gathered regularly at its compound in Kennebunkport, Maine, for seemingly endless rounds of boating, fishing and golf.

She also proved more combative and less forgiving than her husband in challenging political foes or perceived press slights, and appeared more embittered by his loss in a re-election bid in 1992. When meeting her successor as first lady, Hillary Clinton, she pointed to the reporters watching them and declared: "Avoid this crowd like the plague. And if they quote you, make damn sure they heard you."

Barbara Bush, Former First Lady, Dies at Age 92

Former first lady Barbara Bush has died at the age of 92. She was the wife of 41st president George H.W. Bush, mother of 43rd president, George W. Bush, and 2016 candidate Jeb Bush. During and after her time in the White House she championed the cause of improving literacy rates among Americans. Photo: Reuters

After the Bushes left the White House, one of their children, George W. Bush, became governor of Texas and another, Jeb, became governor of Florida. She strongly supported both, as she did the candidacy of George W. Bush when he was elected president in 2000.

Ahead of Jeb Bush mounting his own, ultimately unsuccessful campaign for the presidency, Mrs. Bush didn't sound enthusiastic about seeing her family through political wars, famously declaring that "we've had enough Bushes" in the White House. Once he entered the 2016 race, however, she became a visible supporter.

Barbara Bush was born Barbara Pierce in 1925 and grew up in the suburban town of Rye, N.Y. Her father, Marvin, was a successful business executive who became president of McCall Corp.

She was attending a boarding school in South Carolina when, during a visit back home over Christmas break, she met her future husband, then a senior at Phillips Academy in Andover, Mass., at a dance. She was 16 years old. They became engaged a year and a half later.

World War II intervened to delay the wedding, however. Her fiancé went off to the Pacific as a U.S. Navy torpedo-bomber pilot, where he was shot down and rescued.

When he returned on leave, Barbara Pierce dropped out of Smith College, and they were married in 1945. Later, she recalled: "I married the first man I ever kissed. When I tell my children that they just about throw up."

After her husband graduated from Yale, the two moved to Texas, where he launched into the oil business and she managed a growing family. Tragedy struck when their daughter Robin, not yet four, died of leukemia. The loss led to a lifelong Bush family devotion to the cause of cancer research.

Her husband veered into politics and was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1966, beginning a steady climb up the political ladder. He went on to become ambassador to the United Nations, envoy to China, chairman of the Republican National Committee, head of the Central Intelligence Agency, vice president and then president.

Throughout, Mrs. Bush was the crucial, supportive spouse. By her count, she managed some 30 moves by the Bush family.

After the biggest of those moves, into the White House, she said the nation came to see her as "everybody's grandma," and she enjoyed a burst of popularity. In a Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll taken in early 1992, 70% of Americans said they had a positive view of her—25 points higher than those who had positive views of her husband.

When Mr. Bush was voted out of office, the couple retreated to their longtime home in Houston, while continuing their annual summer trips to Kennebunkport. She remained active in the Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy.

She largely sought to stay out of the national political debate, though she emerged in 2016 to appear with her son Jeb in a joint interview with CBS News designed to promote his campaign.

In that, she offered him this typically pointed critique of his debate performances: "He's almost too polite...If I gave him advice I would say 'Why don't you interrupt like the other people do?'" Then, without naming Donald Trump, she got in a dig at the man who ultimately prevailed in that campaign by comparing her son favorably to him: "He does not brag like some people we know."

The Associated Press

<https://apnews.com/bfb5ad674cec4f90b75b5f790d30eb89/As-GOP-balks,-McConnell-shuts-down-bill-to-protect-Mueller>

s GOP Balks, McConnell Shuts Down Bill To Protect Mueller

by Mary Clare Jalonick, 4/18/18

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell on Tuesday thwarted a bipartisan effort to protect special counsel Robert Mueller's job, saying he will not hold a floor vote on the legislation even if it is approved next week in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

McConnell said the bill is unnecessary because President Donald Trump will not fire Mueller.

"We'll not be having this on the floor of the Senate," McConnell said on Fox News.

His comments came amid widespread opposition to the bill among members of his caucus, with several GOP senators saying the bill is unconstitutional. Others said it's simply not good politics to try and tell Trump what to do, likening the legislation to "poking the bear."

The bipartisan legislation was introduced last week as Trump publicly criticized Mueller, who is investigating potential ties between Russia and Trump's 2016 campaign as well as possible obstruction of justice by the president. Trump, fuming about a raid of his personal lawyer's office by a different division of the FBI, said last week that the Mueller investigation is "an attack on our country" and is "corrupt."

Trump has also privately pondered firing Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who is overseeing Mueller's investigation.

Within a day of Trump's criticism, Republicans Thom Tillis of North Carolina and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina combined two bills they introduced last summer to protect special counsels. They introduced the new bill along with Democratic Sens. Chris Coons of Delaware and Cory Booker of New Jersey, and Senate Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley, a Republican, announced that his committee would vote on the bill.

The legislation would give any special counsel a 10-day window to seek expedited judicial review of a firing, and would put into law existing Justice Department regulations that require a firing to be for "good cause."

Democrats immediately jumped on the legislation, but many Republicans have been cool to it.

At least three of the 11 GOP members of the Judiciary panel have said they will vote against it and another five have said they have questions about its constitutionality. Grassley is one of those with concerns, but said he felt obligated to hold a vote.

Republicans off the committee had questions too — and some acknowledged that it could be politically difficult.

South Dakota Sen. Mike Rounds said Tuesday that Trump should make the decision on his own and be responsible for the consequences.

"I think having Congress tell him what we believe he should do in this case is simply poking the bear, and I'd just prefer not to do that," Rounds said.

Oklahoma Sen. Jim Lankford said the bill is a "political distraction."

"You create this whole constitutional political stir over something that is not going to happen," he said.

Others said there was little point.

It's about as popular as cholera with the leader in the Senate and it's about as popular as malaria in the House," said Louisiana Sen. John Kennedy, a member of the Judiciary panel. "I think most people think we're picking an unnecessary fight with the president."

Coons bristled at the criticism that the legislation is unconstitutional, noting that several courts have upheld similar special counsel statutes.

"If I were convinced this were unconstitutional, I would not be moving it," said Coons, a lawyer.

At a September hearing on the two separate bills, before they were combined, scholars were divided on whether the bills were constitutional, with some voicing concerns that allowing the judicial branch that authority over an executive decision may not pass muster in the courts.

"I think it's probably unconstitutional and I don't think there's any realistic chance that the president will fire Mr. Mueller," Sen. John Cornyn, the No. 2 Republican in the Senate and the former Texas attorney general, said Tuesday.

McConnell agreed, adding that Trump would never support the legislation.

"Just as a practical matter, even if we pass it, why would he sign it?" McConnell said in the Fox interview.

Republicans who have talked to the White House almost uniformly have held the line that Trump will not fire Mueller or Rosenstein — including Tillis and Graham, who say they are pushing the legislation because it would be good policy under any president.

"I don't think he's going to fire Mueller, but I think institutionally it would be nice to have some protections," Graham said Tuesday.

Tillis acknowledged last week that he had taken some "heat" from conservatives for the bill, but told the Judiciary panel, "this is really an opportunity to take an ethical stand, and not do it when the situation benefits you."

Democrats said Republicans opposed to the legislation were simply protecting Trump.

Connecticut Sen. Richard Blumenthal, a member of the Judiciary Committee, said the argument over constitutionality is a "red herring used by some of my colleagues as a pretext for opposing the bill, when they really have other reasons." He gave no specifics.

Virginia Sen. Mark Warner, the top Democrat on the Senate intelligence committee, said the special counsel bill is "so much more" than another policy debate.

"I think this will be one that history will judge us all," Warner said.

TRUMP TWEETS



Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump · 1h

Slippery James Comey, the worst FBI Director in history, was not fired because of the phony Russia investigation where, by the way, there was NO COLLUSION (except by the Dems)!

15K 6.6K 26K



Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump · 3h

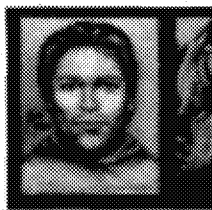
Mike Pompeo met with Kim Jong Un in North Korea last week. Meeting went very smoothly and a good relationship was formed. Details of Summit are being worked out now. Denuclearization will be a great thing for World, but also for North Korea!

5.4K 12K 41K



Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump · 3h

A sketch years later about a nonexistent man. A total con job, playing the Fake News Media for Fools (but they know it)!



Deplorably Scottish @ShennaFoxMusic

Replying to @realDonaldTrump

Oops! This is awkward!

@StormyDaniels's Ex

#IDTheThug

11K 7.7K 25K



Donald J. Trump @realDonaldTrump · 3h

There is a Revolution going on in California. Soooo many Sanctuary areas want OUT of this ridiculous, crime infested & breeding concept. Jerry Brown is trying to back out of the National Guard at the Border, but the people of the State are not happy. Want Security & Safety NOW!

8.2K 11K 44K